1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[P.103]

Chapter IV

MALTA BEFORE A.D. 1800

A. Malta before the Knights

The Maltese Islands were probably first settled towards the end of the third millenium B.C.; certainly there is no evidence of any earlier occupation. From this time onwards, the landscape has had stamped upon it the successive imprints of a series of cultures and culture-contacts. This is not the place to attempt a detailed analytical history, but any study of a region and its people must consider time as well as place. In Malta we have, in the course of our fieldwork, continually felt an extraordinarily strong sense of continuity, an existence that much which is contemporary can only be understood in terms of the past, and often of the remote past. Conversely, a close examination of the landscape can help to illuminate the past in a strictly historical sense.

The sort of question which arises in an investigation of the rural landscape may be exemplified by the much-debated problem of 'cart-ruts'. On some of the expanses of bare rock which exist in various parts of the island of Malta are deeply incised grooves, in dual and parallel alignment, sometimes in isolation, often in complex 'tramway' patterns (Plate VII). Various attempts have been made to explain them (1) but with little success. We are certain only of their approximate age. To the prehistorian they are of obvious direct interest. To ourselves they are irritatingly fascinating because of the indirect and obscure evidence which they seem to offer of the nature of the processes which have operated on the land of Malta. Were they friction-incised through a soil cover by skid-carts? If this is so, then the soil cover must not only have been more extensive than at present but must also have evolved under different climatic and edaphic conditions from those with which we are now familiar. What can we deduce from the present limited exposure of the ruts and from the fact that often they appear to have been blotted out by cultivation? The traditional answer, as put forward by Zammit (2), is that they carried sledges for the collection and transport of soil so that man could concentrate the soil in field plots. Thus field-making inevitably covered the ruts except on the ridges and bluffs. There are defects in these and other explanations, none of which come near to helping us to estimate the number and kind of people involved.

The settlements, too, present problems. Thus the archaeologist: 'The curious and complete absence of settlement-sites throughout the prehistoric period, which also holds good for the Punic and later periods, seems susceptible of only one explanation. The best sites must have been chosen for settlement very early in the islands' occupation and these have remained centres of habitation until the present day' (3). May we then assume that, with the exception of the 'lost villages' of more recent times, the settlement pattern of today results from continual addition to, and an absence of erasures from the palimpsest? The answer is not only of chronological interest but has an essential place in any analysis of present-day Malta.

For such reasons as these we have attempted in this section to give a time perspective to the Maltese picture in order to help our present understanding.

The first Maltese would seem to have been Neolithic farmers using impressed ceramic ware of a type associated with the *Stentinello* culture of eastern Sicily. The stylistically earliest wares of Ghar Dalam (I) (Fig. 29) are associated with megalithic temples already well enough developed to have lost their original tomb character and to have become cult centres. These and later temples, built during the eight centuries before *c.* 1500 B.C. (Period I), are impressive and surviving contributions to the landscape by the first Neolithic people. Megalithic rock-tombs have been found at Xemxija and probably from this type of structure there evolved five distinct and successive phases of temple architecture. The earliest are those of Mġarr (II) and Xewkija (III) with a simple

2:Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

besides the patron saint, parishes celebrate many other saints. The feasts of these secondary saints are normally not as lavish as the annual festa of the patron. But many villages celebrate two large festas: one for the titular saint of the parish, and the other for a secondary saint who has assumed almost equal social importance. Where this occurs, a village is divided into two partiti, each of which has its own band club and celebrates one of the saints. The partiti compete over almost every aspect of the festa, including the decoration of the streets, the adornment of the statue, the number of guest bands and, above all, the fireworks. Even the exact number of communicants, the size of candles and the quantity of light bulbs illuminating the façade of the church often become the subject of dispute. Farrug is divided by this type of rivalry. One partit is dedicated to St. Martin, the titular of the parish, the other to St. Roque.

The origins of these festa partiti, where they can be traced, are very much alike. Most of them came into existence sometime between 1850 and the turn of the century, and most arose out of disputes between persons concerned with the celebration of the titular festa and those interested in the cult of some lesser saint. The latter were usually members of the confraternity dedicated to that saint.[1] These factions in time became centred on separate social clubs, and eventually acquired brass bands. The clubs provided a permanent institutional basis for the rivalry. As time went on, the partiti became more violent in their disputes and in the pressure they put upon individuals to support them. Finally in 1935, the Church, long alarmed at the extremes to which the devotion to some saints had been carried in certain villages, took steps to eliminate the competition. It promulgated a series of regulations designed to reduce the scale on which secondary feasts could be celebrated. These stipulated that for secondary feasts there was to be no Translation of Holy Relics on the eve of the feast, that only the church and the area immediately adjacent to it could

[1] Cf. Rob. Mifsud Bonnici, *Ġrajja Tal-Mużika F'Malta u Għawdex* (Malta, Giov. Muscat, 1954), pp. 38 f. He suggests that these partiti developed out of a dispute between persons who wanted to play sacred music by the Maltese composer Vincenzo Bugeja (1806–60) and those who preferred that of his rival, Paolo Nani (1814–1904). As far as I could determine, however, the only partiti which arose directly out of this dispute are those in Żebbuġ. On the other hand, many rival partiti, once established, played the music of either Bugeja or Nani during their feasts. The former took a star as their symbol, the latter an eagle. Today partiti in many villages are still nicknamed either *tal-istilla* or *tal-ajkla* after this once-important division.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

St. Martin club – that the St. Roque club was not planning to participate in the ceremony in protest against the way they had been treated during the centenary. Dun Frangisk's spontaneous move upset their plans.

Although Dun Frangisk favoured the suggestions that the clubs draw lots, or hire outside bands, St. Martin rejected both because they implied that the clubs had equal status. The last time the St. Roque band had played was six years and four parish priests before, when the local police inspector had devised a compromise solution, and the St. Martin leaders had 'allowed' St. Roque to play the last march of the day, while their band escorted the new priest home. They believed any concession they made now would undo the advantage which they felt they had gained as the only functioning band in the village during the past six years.

Thus it came about that no band played at Dun Frangisk's installation ceremony. This greatly surprised the many visitors from the city and the suburbs, but the good people of the district found it quite in accordance with the way things should be, considering the issues involved. At no point in the series of events were the feelings of the young priest, whom all liked, ever considered. His installation had become the vehicle for a clash between the followers of St. Martin and St. Roque. They had been vying with each other for supremacy long before he was born, and would be at it long after he left. Any concessions made for his sake would have to be entered into the eighty-year-old ledger of credits and debits, and might have an important bearing on the outcome of the next series of encounters.

III

Two interesting problems remain to be considered: why festa partiti arose during the fifty years or so after 1850, and what reasons prompted people to join one partit rather than its rival. The factors which caused the partiti to come into existence at this particular period in Maltese history are necessarily complex, and they are dimmed by the time that has elapsed since their foundation. Nonetheless, one can discern several elements which would appear to be related to the general problem. To begin with, during this period there was a sudden increase in the devotion to the Virgin Mary following her apparition in 1858 at Lourdes, and the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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definition of the dogma of her immaculate conception four years earlier, and to St. Joseph, who was declared patron of the Catholic Church in 1870. Virtually all the secondary partiti are dedicated to one of these two.[1] At the same time, there was a general elaboration of the celebrations connected with the cult of saints, including the Italian and Sicilian custom of having bands play during the festas.[2] These were but a part of the more general influx of Italian ideas and customs which accompanied the refugees from Italy of the Risorgimento, who streamed into Malta following 1850. The propaganda efforts of the pro-Italian politicians of the time assisted in the diffusion of these customs, especially in the urban areas.

During this period a conception of social organization new to Malta was also gaining currency, namely the idea of voluntary associations for laymen, and in particular, social clubs for 'gentlemen'. After the establishment in Valletta of the exclusive British Union Club in 1826 and the equally exclusive Casino Maltese in 1850, clubs of various kinds began to spring up in many villages. They multiplied so rapidly that a local chronicler wrote in 1890, 'Today you don't find a village without one or two, nor a city without three or five.'[3]

The latter half of the last century was a period of relative economic prosperity for Malta. This resulted from the increase in military and naval activity after the outbreak of the Crimean War; the sharp expansion in government spending on public works programmes from 1859 to 1865; and the renewed world demand for Maltese cotton as a result of the cotton shortage created by the American Civil War.[4] The economic boom increased the demand for unskilled labour from the villages. This, in turn, helped to disseminate urban-Italian cultural traits. It also provided a financial basis which permitted increased expenditure on festa decorations, fireworks, and above all, uniforms and instruments for the bands. Finally, this period saw the establishment of government schools in all the villages. City-born schoolmasters moved into rural

[1] See Appendix A.

[2] See, for example, Giuseppe Pitrè, *Feste Patronali in Sicilia*, vol. XXI of *Biblioteca delle Tradizioni Populari Siciliane* (Torino-Palermo, Carlo Clausen, 1900), *passim*. He also indicates that a number of Sicilian towns and villages are divided by rivalry between supporters of different saints. (pp. xlvii ff.)

[3] P. P. Castagna, *Lis-Storia Ta Malta* (3 vols.; Valletta, C. Busuttil, 1890), III, 128.

[4] Charles A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration* (Melbourne, Georgian House, 1954), pp. 103 ff.

4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

Medical Votive Offerings in the Maltese Islands

PAUL CASSAR

THE MALTESE GROUP OF ISLANDS—Malta, Gozo, Kemmuna, Kemmunet and Filfla—cover an area of just over 120 square miles. They form a stepping-stone between Europe and Africa, being fifty-eight miles distant from Sicily and 180 miles away from the North African shore. Malta and Gozo are renowned for the number of Stone Age temples they contain. Archaeologists have expressed the opinion that some of the enclosures of these temples were sacred to a healing deity (Zammit 1926, p. 53). This is suggested by the discovery of clay and limestone objects consisting of (1) two models of women lying asleep on a kind of stretcher of wicker work, and (2) several votive offerings in the shape of parts of the human body (Zammit & Singer 1924, pp. 75–6).

It is believed that the sleeping ladies represent devotees who went to the Hypogeum temple at Hal Saflieni, near Pawla, to consult the oracle through the practice of oneiromancy. This was a form of dream interpretation after the patient had been aroused from a hypnotic state induced deliberately by means of drugs or other means (Zammit 1935, p. 58). In ancient Egypt dreams were regarded with reverence and the faithful believed that their prayers were rewarded by the gods with an indication, in their dreams, of the remedies which their illness required (Wilkinson 1837, III, p. 394). Similar practices prevailed also in the temple-hospitals of classical Greece where the patient is said to have had the line of treatment revealed to him in his sleep (Pavey 1951, p. 59). It is, therefore, quite possible that such methods were likewise followed in Malta by the Hypogeum priests in the treatment of disease about 1500 B.C. Whatever might have happened in Malta in neolithic days, it is very striking to come across similar parallels in modern times where sick persons claim to have been healed by a heavenly power while in the sleeping state.

The following cases were recorded in 1890, the first being the most interesting as the patient fell asleep in the church itself:

(i) A woman had been subject to a purulent inflammation of the mouth for fifteen years. She had recourse to the Virgin Mary and while praying at Ta Pinu church (Gharb, Gozo) she was overtaken by extreme somnolence. She woke up with the conviction that the Madonna had granted her the desired favour; in fact, she recovered completely from her illness within three days.

(ii) Maria Cachia, from a village in Gozo, was so gravely ill from puerperal fever that it was decided to give her the Last Sacraments. Her mother made a vow to the Virgin Mary and annointed the patient on the forehead and breasts with oil obtained from the sanctuary lamp of Ta Pinu church. Maria fell into a calm sleep. Our Lady appeared to her in a vision, touched her on the parts smeared with the oil and healed her. On waking she was "happy and smiling and left her bed completely cured".

4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

175 755 787 781 (iii) Giovanna Debrincat had been suffering from depression with religious scruples for eight months. Her symptoms became acute one day in February with extreme anxiety, agitation, and insomnia. This phase lasted for four consecutive days and nights in spite of the efforts of the doctor and a priest to reassure her and placate her. Finally her relatives annointed her with the sanctuary oil and appealed to the Blessed Virgin to cure her. The patient immediately became tranquil and had a peaceful sleep. When she woke up, all her symptoms had disappeared (*Id-devot ta Maria*, 1890).

NEOLITHIC VOTIVE OFFERINGS

532 172 782 [171] The custom of offering 'ex-votos' to the deity for favours received is not limited to the Maltese Islands and goes back to very remote times. The neolithic 'ex-votos' of Malta are made of clay and limestone, and measure from 1¼ to 3¼ inches in height. No less than fifteen of them, consisting of the following anatomical forms, have been found:

(i) Faces: 2.
(ii) Hand: 1.
(iii) Female torsos with large abdomen, pendulous breasts, and prominent genitalia: 4.
(iv) Kneeling female (?) torso with arms folded on breast: 2.
(v) Fragment of female statuette consisting of lower abdomen, both thighs, and right leg: 1.
(vi) Female body cut short in the neck and upper parts of the thighs; the left arm is bent on the nape of the neck and the right upper limb points to the genitalia which are very clearly shown. The abdomen and breasts are very full and a swelling fills the left groin while pieces of white shells are stuck in the armpits, groins, umbilicus, mons veneris, and other parts.
(vii) Female pelvis with upper parts of thighs and sexual triangle: 2.
(viii) Legs: 2 (Zammit & Singer 1924, p. 67).

• 17 782 [997] The Roman occupation of Malta (218 B.C.–A.D. 397) is represented by one solitary 'ex-voto' consisting of a clay model of the lateral view of a leg and foot. It was found quite recently with other Roman objects in the north-west part of the island (Plate 1, Fig. 2). The inhabitants of the Maltese Islands were converted to Christianity by St Paul in A.D. 60. No more 'ex-votos' can be traced for many hundreds of years until they reappear in the eighteenth century under the influence of the Catholic Church. The interruption in the time-sequence and the change of religious beliefs do not, however, prevent us from perceiving that they have a common purpose and that the 'ex-votos' of Stone Age and Roman times foreshadow the similar ones of later years. Indeed the same ideational process links the ancient ones with those of our own times.

782 532 755 Anatomical 'ex-votos' are still preserved in many of the Catholic churches of Malta and Gozo and in several wayside shrines in the countryside and in niches in the towns. They are either figures of the complete human body or of parts of it. The former consist of the front view of babies with the trunk and limbs swathed in bands like a mummy; and of side views of men and women in a kneeling posture with their hands joined in prayer over their breasts or else holding a symbolical heart. The men are turned towards the left and the women look towards the right. The models representing parts of the

361 Map 3, showing density of population by localities for 1957, closely reflects the built-up area pattern. Broadly-speaking it resembles Map 4 (residence of Dockyard workers) but here the emphasis on Valletta and Sliema, and all the northern part of the Urban zone, is notably less.

THE VILLAGE

621 [361] Maltese rural society is essentially composed of village communities each occupying a compact settlement[8]. There are some three dozen villages in the rural area of the Islands[9] among which there is considerable variation in site, date of foundation, morphology, population (B/561) and economic structure (B/361), but throughout the Islands there is a uniformity of function within the village as a community group. This makes it possible to speak of "the Maltese Village" from the point of view of social structure, and allows a qualifying classification into types on the basis of the features mentioned.

• 17 Maltese society as a whole, and particularly the rural part of it, is to some extent cut off from outside influences by virtue of the insular position of the country, cultural as well as geographical. Yet the Islands have clearly at no time in their history been independent of Europe to the north, Africa to the south and Asia to the east. Quite patently the opposite has been the case and Malta, as ever the mute pawn of great powers, has absorbed its material and moral culture from abroad just as it has received additions to its population whether coming as traders, invaders, or settlers, for four thousand years. But the Islands have put their own stamp on these arrivals so that a discussion such as this must take account of both autochthonous developments within the Islands, as well as those of wider origin.

17 621 The elements within the traditional Maltese village were, briefly, the Roman Catholic Church and clergy, the landed class, and the mass of the population - an illiterate peasantry. 'Traditional' here refers to rural society as it existed in Malta one, two or three centuries ago.

This is not to say that the traditional has been erased from the present scene but rather that recent moves towards literacy, emancipation and communication, and a greater range of amenities within the Islands, have diversified and modified the traditional aspects to produce a variety of different types in place of the social uniformity of the past. But the traditional nucleus within the village, the Parish Priest and the Parish Church retain their pivotal role. The modification of this role is very apparent but the place of the Church has been affected far less in the country districts [793] [795]

of Malta and Gozo than in the towns, where dockyard developments and other industrialization have produced a new kind of social environment. This is an important subject in itself but, for the present, attention is to be confined to the rural districts where change has to date been slower than in the towns but where the same factors are appearing now along with the rapid 'urbanization' of the villages.

In traditional Malta the function of the clergy[10] extended far beyond matters of religion. The priests were the teachers, doctors, and legal advisors as well as spiritual guardians of the people. Government-organized education began in the nineteenth century. Previously such formal education as there was had been under ecclesiastical auspices. The clergy were literate when almost all the rest of the population was not. This concentration of learning produced a situation in which only the clergy were able to step forward to take the lead among Maltese, for the nobility, which might have been expected to provide a focus and leadership, tended to be more Italian or Spanish than Maltese. Even revolutionary leaders came from the ranks of the clergy; the Mannarino Revolt against the Order of St. John (1775) and the rising against the French during the brief occupation of the Islands by Napoleon (1798-1800) are instances.

For some centuries before the arrival of the British in 1800, the Church had built up its dominating position in both village and town. Even the educated townsman going to the University came strongly under the influence of the Church, for the University, itself a Jesuit foundation of long standing, was and still is best known for its Theology. However, during the nineteenth century, the major changes within the Church of Malta were connected with purely administrative details of keeping pace with the rapidly rising population[1].

Many new parishes were created in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth. The Archbishopric of Malta was established in 1831 with the separation from the jurisdiction of Palermo, and the Bishopric of Gozo was founded in 1863. A movement of great sociological importance during the present century has been the growth of the Lay Apostolate in the Islands, especially in the urban areas. This represents a counter-attack against the forces which are today tending to detract from the traditional omnipotence of the Church. It is only a matter of time before the problems which the Church is facing in the towns will loom much larger than at present in the country districts and in Gozo[11].

361 Mellieha (1841), Mgarr (1898) and St. Paul's Bay (1905).
175 In Gozo seven new parishes appeared in just over a century:
103 Ghajnsielem[19] (1855), Qala (1872), Kercem (1885), San Lawrenz (1893), Fontana (part of Victoria, 1911), Ghasri (1921), and Munxar (1957; v. Sannat, Map 1).

19 In the period reviewed the major development has been
361 the emergence of Valletta and the Three Cities under the
369 Order and the tremendous urban extension in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The town-villages of medieval Malta, looking inwards to Rabat, grew quietly but were eclipsed by the youthful Valletta and remained agriculturally and socially isolated. In recent generations the economic 'draw' of the towns and the harbour area penetrated the Fringe zone and then the Rural districts, bringing all the countryside in some measure within the economic sphere of the towns. This has been accompanied by the education and emancipation of the rural community which tends to blur the line of demarcation between townsman and villager. Thus an adequate definition of 'Rural Malta' becomes increasingly elusive.

SECTION 2:- The Farmer and Farming

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DEFINITIONS

In much the same way in which the terms 'rural community' and village' need examination before they can be used in socio-economic analysis, so too, in Malta, do the meanings of 'farmer', 'farm-holding', etc., even as used in official reports, need elucidation.

128 The definitions of such terms made by Mitchell (B/525)
24 have been accepted by the present writer. The 'farmer' is
423 the "owner or holder of the land which he cultivates either
[114] individually or as the principal person of an agricultural enterprise". "The land worked by the farmer and his group of helpers constitutes the 'farm holding' or 'farm'. 'Holding' here implies simply the land held by the farmer, and is not used in a synonomous sense with the legalistic 'tenement'. There are excellent reasons for maintaining a clear distinction between the two terms for, on the one hand, a holding may consist of many different tenements held by the farmer of as many landowners and, on the other, a legal tenement may be occupied by more than one farmer.
311 Confusion may also arise, in this connection, from the fact
423 that a holding may contain freehold as well as various types of leasehold land". Mitchell continues "Most farms include land of more than one category, and especially in the north